

NEW YORK, CHICAGO & ST. LOUIS RAILROAD, ELK CREEK TRESTLE  
(Nickel Plate Railroad, Elk Creek Trestle)  
Pennsylvania Historic Railroad Bridges Recording Project  
Spanning Elk Creek, south of Elk Park Rd.  
Lake City vic.  
Erie County  
Pennsylvania

HAER No. PA-527

HAER  
PA  
25-LACI.V,  
2-

PHOTOGRAPHS

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WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD  
National Park Service  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

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Location: Spanning Elk Creek, south of Elk Park Rd., Lake City vicinity,  
Erie County, Pennsylvania.

USGS Quadrangle: Fairview, Pennsylvania (7.5-minute series).

UTM Coordinates: 17/553930/4650170

Date of Construction: 1902.

Basis for Dating: Secondary sources.

Date of Alteration: 1944.

Designer: Unknown.

Fabricator / Builder: Unknown.

Present Owner: Norfolk Southern Railroad.

Present Use: Railroad bridge.

Structure Types: Riveted steel trestle bent; riveted steel deck girder.

Significance: The Nickel Plate's Elk Creek crossing is an excellent example of  
the long trestles required to cross northwestern Pennsylvania's  
irregular topography.

Historian: Justin M. Spivey, April 2000.

Project Information: The Historic American Engineering Record (HAER) conducted the  
Pennsylvania Historic Railroad Bridges Recording Project during  
1999 and 2000, under the direction of Eric N. DeLony, Chief. The  
project was supported by the Consolidated Rail Corporation  
(Conrail) and a grant from the Pennsylvania Historical and  
Museum Commission (PHMC). Justin M. Spivey, HAER  
engineer, researched and wrote the final reports. Preston M.  
Thayer, historian, Fredericksburg, Virginia, conducted preliminary

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research under contract. Jet Lowe, HAER photographer, and Joseph E. B. Elliott, contract photographer, Sellersville, Pennsylvania, produced large-format photographs.

## Description and History

An 1896 history of Erie County mentions the New York, Chicago & St. Louis Railroad (Nickel Plate Road) "crossing the Elk creek valley by an iron bridge, within sight from Girard borough."<sup>1</sup> This account of an iron "bridge" understates the 1,470'-0"-long trestle necessary to cross the broad Elk Creek valley, which is more than 200 feet deep at this point. The Nickel Plate Road, a latecomer in the New York-to-Chicago market, built the iron trestle on stone foundations in 1882.<sup>2</sup> The superstructure, rebuilt in steel twenty years later, consists of thirty-three riveted deck plate girders, mostly 60'-0" spans between 30'-0" trestle bents, except for an 80'-0" span over the creek near the west end, and two 50'-0" spans elsewhere. Given the tendency of railroads to replace trestles with earth embankments — as the parallel Lake Shore & Michigan Southern Railway did to its trestle across Elk Creek as early as 1858 — it is unusual that the Nickel Plate Road's 1902 trestle remains in place today.<sup>3</sup> This structure remains an excellent example of its type.

Periodic reinforcement has allowed the Elk Creek trestle almost a century of service. In 1933-34, and again in 1941, the railroad strengthened the towers to carry heavier locomotives. As traffic during World War II imposed even greater loads, the Nickel Plate Road hired the Ferro Construction Company of Chicago to strengthen the girders of several tall viaducts along its line. Except for the span over Elk Creek, which had reinforcing plates applied in place, the other girders were swapped out one at a time. Starting with an extra girder, Ferro Construction crews followed a procedure of "substituting newly-reinforced spans for existing spans, reinforcing the spans so released, and reinserting them in the bridge in place of other spans to be reinforced." This required only a 60- to 90-minute interruption of train traffic.<sup>4</sup> The trestle has since outlasted its original owner. The Norfolk & Western Railroad (later renamed Norfolk Southern Railroad) purchased the Nickel Plate Road in 1965.<sup>5</sup>

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**Notes**

1. Benjamin Whitman, *Nelson's Biographical Dictionary and Historical Reference Book of Erie County, Pennsylvania* (Erie, Pa.: S. B. Nelson, 1896), 303, cited in Steph Gaub, Library and Archives Assistant, Erie County Historical Society, letter to author, 31 Dec. 1999.
2. Interstate Commerce Commission, Bureau of Valuation, Engineering Field Notes, New York, Chicago & St. Louis Railroad, Jun. 1918, Box 6938, RG 134, National Archives, College Park, Md.
3. Whitman, *Nelson's Biographical Dictionary*, 303.
4. "Stronger Viaducts for War Traffic," *Railway Age* 116, No. 25 (17 Jun. 1944): 1168.
5. Thomas T. Taber III, *Railroads of Pennsylvania: Encyclopedia and Atlas* (Muncy, Pa.: Thomas T. Taber III, 1987), 122.

**Acknowledgment**

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